

Alums and Parents Extol Benefits of GRC Experiences

In this issue of *mindwonders*, two GRC alums describe the tremendous impact Gifted Resource Council had on inspiring their future careers and empowering their success. The elder of the two—an accomplished computer programmer—and his wife are making sure their children have opportunities to benefit from GRC programs in much the same way he did. And the younger of the two alums? He is already working for a NASA contractor while still a college undergraduate. As for the multiple successes they both have already achieved in two highly technical and competitive career venues, these two agree GRC programs fueled their passions and influenced the path they have taken with their vocations.

GRC Inspired, Nurtured Young NASA Scientist

Walter Deitzler thoroughly enjoyed his Space Academy experiences at GRC, including the teamwork with other young cadets and the practical challenges they faced together. The thrill of building and launching his own personal rocket with the A engine in 2005, visiting the Science Center and the airplane simulator are among his fondest GRC memories. “These experiences definitely pushed me into being interested in space as a whole,” he said. “I learned I wanted to work on rockets, more than airplanes.”

His career interests were also influenced by studying programming (Scratch Your Itch), NXT Generation Robotics, and Civil War Strategy & Battle Tactics at GRC. “My robotic experiences at GRC pushed me toward a career in mechanical engineering involved in space technology,” he said. A University City High School grad and now a junior majoring in mechanical engineering at the University of Alabama-Huntsville, Walter is active in the school’s Space Hardware Club which competes in the annual CanSat Competition sponsored by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the American Astronautical Society and NASA. “Our satellite was

designed to deploy from a rocket at an altitude of 3,000 feet,” he explained. “After the satellite deployed, it descended in a canister to an altitude of 400 meters, then deployed from the canister and glided to the ground, taking pictures and gathering data on the way down.”

Walter’s achievements grow more impressive. He interned for NASA subcontractor JACOBS Engineering Group working on the Space Launch System (SLS) Program in Huntsville over the summer. Now back in school, he continues working 15 hours a week as part of the Human Factors team working on the interface between the SLS and the space capsule Orion, NASA’s newest space craft designed to “take humans farther than they’ve ever gone before. Orion will serve as the exploration vehicle that will carry the crew to space, provide emergency abort capability, sustain the crew during space travel, and provide safe re-entry from deep space return velocities.”

In addition to the challenge of the work itself, Walter values working for NASA “because it’s like a nation united behind a program.”

Working on Orion for NASA as an undergraduate is quite an impressive achievement just 12 years after a 7-year-old was inspired to build and launch his own rocket! Who knows what great things Walter will go on to accomplish after he graduates college and follows his dreams fulltime. In addition, Walter’s positive GRC experiences motivated his father Ed to serve on the GRC board for seven years, including two years as Treasurer.

“As a parent, I really appreciated the GRC Summer Academies and Learning Labs because they opened all three of my children’s eyes to so many interesting topics and encouraged them to explore paths they may not otherwise have pursued,” said Kim Deitzler, Walter’s mother. “The variety of camps and courses offered meant that there was something to please everyone, and my kids still talk



Walter Deitzler prepares his rocket for launch during GRC’s Space Academy in 2005.

Dialogue with the Director

As Gifted Resource Council approaches its 35th year, it is with great pride that this edition of *mindwonders* features how GRC programs have touched the lives of two enterprising young men. As Executive Director of a nonprofit organization, I am often called upon to discuss the impact of Gifted Resource Council's programs. It is the stories I hear from Gifted Resource Council alumni, such as Walter Deitzler and Heath Borders, which best illustrate how GRC makes a difference through its mission to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.

Gifted Resource Council impacts families throughout the St. Louis community and beyond through unique high-quality programs geared to serve the special needs of bright and talented children. How is GRC distinctive in its programming? Children as young as age three can

attend GRC's Saturday Learning Labs. In addition to GRC's Learning Labs, bright and talented children who may not have access to gifted programs at their school may attend any of the three programs GRC offers, including GRC's Summer Academies and Academic Challenge Cup. GRC has exceptional teachers that specialize in educating gifted and high-achieving children with rigorous, stimulating courses. All GRC programs involve an affective element, with teamwork and cooperation along with self-awareness as primary components of the curriculum.

Another distinction is that Gifted Resource Council recognizes that its mission includes supporting the entire family, as in offering Parenting Classes regarding the unique qualities of gifted and bright children. Experts help parents with guidance in many topics related to issues children and families face today. These workshops are offered conveniently during Saturday Learning Lab sessions and GRC's Academic Challenge Cup so as not to alter a family's busy schedule.



Susan Jesse, GRC Executive Director

While a gifted education teacher, I was able to take advantage of the resources GRC provided. My district's gifted program brought all of its third graders to GRC's Creative Convention, a highlight for these students. Students with a love of mathematics enjoyed participating in GRC's Equations competitions. Parents benefitted from attending the free parenting workshops offered while teams were busy during GRC's Academic Challenge Cup. In addition, I encouraged the parents of high ability children, including the students that did not qualify for the district's gifted program but needed enrichment programming, to attend Gifted Resource Council programs. I feel tremendous satisfaction in continuing to promote GRC's programs and mission.

This summer, a young GRC Space Academy cadet wrote: "Thank you so much for the opportunity to participate in this great program. This has truly been a learning experience for me because I was able to focus on my life's dream of becoming a scientist for NASA." Be sure to read the feature articles on how GRC programs made an impact on alums Walter and Heath. There are many more narratives such as theirs. Becoming a member of Gifted Resource Council helps to ensure that there will be many more such stories in the future. By joining or renewing your GRC membership today, you too can help make an impact on gifted and talented children, many like Walter, Heath, and this summer's grateful Summer Academies participant, as they reach to achieve their passions.

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about experiences they enjoyed through their involvement in GRC."

Another Alum Continues the Learning Tradition: Enrolling His Children in Programs that Inspired Him

Heath Borders credits GRC for nurturing the interests that led to his computer programming career and is determined to use GRC programs to enrich the educational opportunities of his children. "I want my children to participate in GRC programs as often as possible," he said.

Heath found his experiences in GRC's Space Academy from 1987-89 to be "very enriching"—just as his parents had hoped. To their credit, even though Heath was in a program for gifted students in the Francis Howell School District, his far-sighted parents so valued the special challenges and learning opportunities GRC offered that they deemed the trek from St. Charles well worth the time and effort. Heath is very grateful.

Now, even though Benjamin is in the Webster Groves School District gifted program, Heath and his wife Katie, a creative writer of poetry, short stories and two novels, are making sure that both their children have the same GRC enrichment opportunities that benefited Heath. In fact, their eldest son Benjamin participated in Space Academy in 2016 and in Math, Marvels & More in 2017. Samuel, a kindergartener, will begin his GRC career next summer.

Young Heath so enjoyed his GRC experiences that he continued to build and launch some 25 personal rockets after Space Academy concluded! And yes, he has kept them all for the memories they trigger. Perhaps they will serve to inspire his sons as well. And Heath's mother? She remains a huge GRC fan. In fact, she saved Heath's Space Academy t-shirts and passed them along to Ben when he began attending GRC classes last year! Yes, GRC is certainly a valued Borders family tradition!

In 2003, Heath graduated with a double major in math and computer science from the University of Missouri. In 2010, as a volunteer, he founded STL Mobile Dev, a software development support group for the St. Louis area focused on mobile platforms (iPhone, Android, webOS, etc.).

And the career GRC helped inspire? Heath works as a software engineer writing programs for a subsidiary of Amazon, Twitch Interactive, the world's leading video platform and community for gamers. Its game video management and streaming platform allows gamers to broadcast, watch and talk about video games.

"We are delighted that Heath had such meaningful experiences at GRC," said Executive Director Susan Jesse. "And we look forward to providing his children with the same type of hands-on challenges that stimulated and inspired him and so many other young people over the years."

Don't miss out! Receive Gifted Resource Council's brochures, links to current *mindwonders*, and program updates delivered to your computer or phone electronically. You may do so securely by opting-in to GRC's MailChimp account. Contact our office at 314-962-5920 or info@giftedresourcecouncil.org for more information.



Walter and his University of Alabama's Space Hardware team's CanSat project in 2016.



Ben Borders, a participant in GRC's 2016 and 2017 Summer Academies, proudly wears the shirt that his father, Heath Borders, received when he attended GRC's Space Academy in the late 1980's.

Parents Ask: Because he is so bright, our child is often bored with other children his age and doesn't like spending time with them. That's completely normal, isn't it?

by Dennis O'Brien

Normal? Avoiding peers may be all too commonplace, but it's not healthy. Granted, making friends can be challenging for gifted children. Often, they relish their own abilities and do not feel comfortable with children who do not share their intellectual skills and focus. As a result, some become isolated and fail to develop social skills.

Adults who put too much emphasis on a bright child's intelligence make it more difficult for the child to acquire age-appropriate social skills. As a result, too many children who excel in academic areas are developmentally arrested in their psychosocial growth. And, they may lack friends.

Here are some things parents can do.

Make being well-rounded important for your child

- Don't fall into the trap of serving as an approving audience for your child's narrow focus on her intellectual abilities. Gifted children tend to seek adult attention and approval for their intellectual abilities and achievements, and excessive adult approval makes it less necessary for a child to communicate with same-age peers, develop appropriate social skills and form friendships.

- Make it clear that you expect your child to learn to get along with all his classmates and to form friendships with some of them. Explain how important being well-rounded, having social skills and making friends are to you. Yes, it's nice to be smart—and it's smart to be nice!

Be proactive

- Look for opportunities to praise the character traits, skills and behaviors of other children. Avoid references to intelligence. Instead, focus on traits like their ability to get along with others, their honesty, kindness, perseverance, cooperation, and athletic, musical or performing skills.

- Proactively help your child form friendships with children who may not be her intellectual peers but have other things to offer. For some children, parental encouragement may be enough. For others, you may need to arrange social occasions with other children consistently. You may need to coach your child on how to behave before these occasions and to follow up by discussing how she did behave. Gifted children can be so self-absorbed that they are unaware of how their behavior affects others.

Prepare and coach your child

- Explicitly teach your child basic social skills. Teachers and counselors who work extensively with gifted children remark at how often these children do not make eye contact with others, fail to smile or say good morning, fail to use other children's names, praise others, make intentional efforts to be pleasant or simply ask, "How was your weekend?" Remind her that it's smart to be nice.

- Role-play these skills with your child. Identify some specific situations that are likely to occur in her daily life, and work on these.

- Don't take it for granted that your child is using the social skills she may have begun to acquire. Ask her how frequently she used these skills each day. Is she making efforts to be nice to others each day? Ask for examples. Praise her for doing so. Ask how other children respond. Make it clear that you value her efforts to be friendly and are proud of her for making them.

Reflect on your own behavior

- Are you modeling the "smart to be nice" approach you expect from your child? Parents who justifiably delight in their child's intellectual ability sometimes criticize teachers, insist on special treatment for their child, try to micromanage her academic career and, in the process, may unintentionally belittle other children. Does this describe your behavior? Have you complained that your child was being held back by others and not sufficiently challenged or recognized by teachers for her academic prowess? How often do you thank teachers for the good job they are doing? How often do you encourage a teacher to promote the psychosocial development of your child as well as her academic growth?

Use other resources, including Gifted Resource Council

- Recruit your child's teacher to partner with you in promoting his psychosocial growth. Although she may be aware that your child needs help learning to interact with other children, the teacher may be reluctant to take the initiative to help him improve. If the teacher knows that helping your child develop the social habits he needs for success and happiness in life is important to you, she will be more likely to help. Encourage the teacher to not give attention to your child when he inappropriately seeks her approval rather than interacting with classmates. Arrange for the teacher to keep you informed of how your child is interacting with classmates. In short, recruit the teacher to be your teammate.

- Involve your child in extracurricular activities that promote cooperation. Team sports are excellent, as are activities like theater, band or scouting. Avoid intellectual competitions unless they are the rare kind like GRC's Academic Challenge Cup which promotes teamwork. Activities which stress cooperation with teammates and fair play with opponents will help your child develop social skills.

- Insist that your child be involved in at least one such activity year-round. If your child complains—as many

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gifted children do—that he is not good at the activity, so much the better. Participating on a team in which his performance is average or below average will help a child develop empathy for others who do not excel at school. It also develops perseverance, an invaluable trait for real success in life.

- Programs and competitions which focus rather narrowly on intellectual ability may do more harm than good for gifted children. Unless a child has unusual support from parents to be well-rounded and can resist the pull of these programs, the child will become more focused on intellectual prowess and adult recognition, while falling further behind in psychosocial development.

Take advantage of GRC programs

- All Gifted Resource Council programs go beyond academics to promote growth in interpersonal skills. Not only are GRC's programs themselves designed to do this, but teachers are hired with this in mind and then given further training to enhance their abilities to promote this type of growth.

Even the academic approach of GRC programs is special. GRC's Saturday Learning Labs, Summer Academies, and Academic Challenge Cup are not only based on teamwork, but on creativity, a focus on the process rather than the product, along with an interdisciplinary approach built into every class. In short, the academic challenge is broadening rather than restrictive, the approach is based on cooperation, and the goal is to strengthen the interpersonal skills of students while challenging them with an enrichment program unlike those in their home schools.

Parents who intentionally use strategies like these can help a child with the social skills and peer friendships so essential for being well-rounded and successful in life.

Dennis O'Brien is a licensed clinical social worker, experienced educator and therapist, who has led five nonprofits. He has written educational materials for the Washington University School of Medicine Dept. of Psychiatry, weekly columns on parenting for the Suburban Journal/Post-Dispatch and numerous columns for St. Louis Moms and Dads, CHARACTERplus, Family Connection (Mo. Dept. of Mental Health) and Gifted Association of Missouri. O'Brien's April 6, 2010 column in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch/Suburban Journals, "Prevent teen suicide by addressing it," won the 2010 Missouri Institute of Mental Health award for outstanding reporting on suicide.

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While online, don't forget to "Like" Gifted Resource Council's Facebook page to keep up with GRC updates!

GRC Students Benefit from Teacher Extraordinaire

Kathleen Murphy, MEd, exemplifies the remarkable teaching experience and expertise that characterize GRC instructors. During the school year, she teaches science at Ladue Middle School and serves as coach for Ladue's award winning Science Olympiad teams, one of the premier science competitions in the nation. Kathy also serves as a lead implementer with the American Meteorological Society's Educational Initiatives program, which offers specialized training for educators in weather, water, and climate sciences.

And all that vast experience enriches Gifted Resource Council. For the past 20 summers Kathy has taught GRC's Space Academy and Advanced Space Academy. In addition, for the past nine years she has also taught the science component of Math, Marvels & More.

Why such commitment? "I like it that GRC stresses teamwork and hands-on activities as part of the learning process," she said. "We work on social skills so that these students will be successful in their future endeavors."

In the late '90s and early 2000s Kathy was an integral part of the team of teachers who led GRC's "Amazon Rainforest Student Research Project". This unique experience took middle school students to the rainforest of Ecuador where they researched soil nutrient levels and water quality in the primal rainforest, reforested rainforest and deforested rainforest. "Students learned about real-life problem solving while also learning to appreciate what they left behind at home - air conditioning, toilets without snakes and potable water," she notes. Through this program Kathy significantly inspired young people from throughout the metro area to pursue their interests in scientific endeavors. Indeed, more than a few of these young people have continued into scientific careers.

"Kathy is an exceptional teacher and genuine asset to Gifted Resource Council," said GRC Executive Director Susan Jesse who taught with Kathy in Space Academy for 10 years. "Not only is she highly knowledgeable, but the calm way she guides her students gains their respect. Kathy ultimately inspires students to attain higher achievements while reinforcing their love of science. We are deeply grateful that Kathy has continued to enrich the lives of our students."



Kathy Murphy inspires curiosity in the sciences as she instructs GRC Math, Marvels & More students.

Thanks to...

...the following individuals who made financial contributions to Gifted Resource Council from May 2016 through September 2017. We apologize for any names which may have been inadvertently omitted or misspelled.

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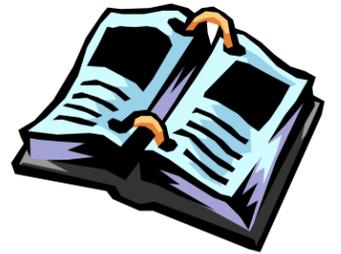
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February 3 - March 10, 2018 (Six Saturdays) – **Winter Learning Lab** at Wydown Middle School, 6500 Wydown Blvd. Parenting Classes will be offered.
February 27 and February 28, 2018 – GRC's Academic Challenge Cup **Equations** Competitions at University of Missouri-St. Louis. Parenting classes will be offered.
March 1 and March 2, 2018 – GRC's Academic Challenge Cup **Creative Convention** at University of Missouri-St. Louis. Parenting classes will be offered.
March 13 and March 14, 2018 – GRC's Academic Challenge Cup **Equations** Competitions at Washington University in St. Louis. Parenting classes will be offered.
March 15, 2018 – GRC's Academic Challenge Cup **LinguiSHTIK** Competitions at Washington University in St. Louis. Parenting classes will be offered.

**For more information on any of these events, contact GRC:
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Gifted Resource Council
357 Marshall Ave., Suite 6
St. Louis, MO 63119
314-962-5920
www.giftedresourcecouncil.org

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Gifted Resource Council is a not-for-profit education agency serving the greater St. Louis Metropolitan area. Its purpose is to bring together the resources of the community, the schools and parents to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.